

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

September 23, 2014

Ms. Eileen Sobeck
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Ms. Susan Hassett
Director
Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center
P.O. Box 61280
New Orleans, LA 70161

Dear Administrator Sobeck and Director Hassett:

Both the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Waterborne Commerce Statistics Center (Waterborne Commerce) have separate but related responsibilities to track and record commercial fishing activity within American waters. The NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service currently collects data directly from our domestic fishing fleet about where they fish and what they catch to inform their fisheries management decision making process, but that data is wholly omitted from the Waterborne Commerce analysis of commercial activity along our nation's ports and waterways. The Waterborne Commerce analysis plays a major role in prioritizing Army Corps' dredging activities, and it is imperative that impacts of our domestic fisheries are accurately accounted for in that process.

In 2012, commercial fishermen along the Gulf of Mexico landed 1.7 billion pounds of finfish and shellfish worth \$763 million. Louisiana fishermen were responsible for over half of that with 857 million pounds, the highest commercial landings for any State in the continental United States. Unfortunately, their access to the fertile fishing grounds off our coast continues to be threatened by shallow, unmaintained channels. The Barataria Bay Waterway, which connects the communities of Jean Lafitte, Crown Point, Barataria, and Grand Isle with the Gulf of Mexico, is only 4-6 feet deep in some places despite having an authorized channel depth of 13 feet, and commercial fishermen are being forced to light load their vessels to make it safely back to the dock.

Our domestic seafood industry supports 1.3 million jobs, but, in coastal communities like those I represent, commercial fishing is more than a line of work – it is a way of life. I ask that you work together to find a way to share the commercial fisheries landing data already being collected to ensure that our domestic fisheries are fully and fairly factored into the Waterborne Commerce analysis. We cannot ignore our fishermen anymore.

With warm regards, I am

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu
United States Senator